DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 588 CS 215 762

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TITLE Compositional Metaphors: A Pedagogical Necessity.
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Communication; Classroom Techniques; Higher Education; Instructional Improvement; Learning Strategies; *Metaphors; Teacher Student Relationship; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Classical Rhetoric; *Dichotomies

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a compilation of compositional metaphors suggested as appropriate for use in writing instruction. The paper states that compositionalists deal continuously with a wide variety of complex and potentially undesirable dichotomies caused by differences in experience, physiology, and ethnicity. According to the paper some of these dichotomies include reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer, mature/naive, cosmopolitan/provincial, and broad-minded/narrow-minded. The paper offers the opinion that these differences may pose harmful barriers to effective writing instruction, not only among students within the same classroom, but also between individual teachers and students. Suggested in the paper is the use of the metaphors to suffuse pedagogical approaches, lesson plans, and notions of classical rhetoric such as invention, arrangement, and style. (CR)

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ED 405 588

Frank A. Davis

"Compositional Metaphors: A Pedagogical Necessity"

Overview

Compositionalists deal continuously with a wide variety of complex and potentially divisive dichotomies caused by differences in experience, physiology, and ethnicity. These differences pose potential barriers to effective writing instruction, not only among students within the same classroom, but also between individual teachers and students.

What better way to transcend these differences and avoid undesirable dichotomies than to use the appropriate metaphor, since metaphor means--literally--to carry or go beyond? Compositional metaphors such as coach, judge, accoucheur/euse, craftsperson, and trouper enable writing teachers and those they teach to transcend differences in experience, physiology, and ethnicity, and thereby obviate undesirable dichotomies.

Differences of experience in producing written language yield dichotomies which include reader/non-reader, literate/oral, and expert writer/novice writer. Differences in life experience yield dichotomies which include mature/naive, cosmopolitan/provincial, and broad-minded/narrow-minded. Differences in physiology and ethnicity yield dichotomies of gender, race, sexual orientation, and cognitive styles. Such dichotomies may cause an "insider/outsider" distinction that can devastate teacher-student and student-student relationships.

This compositionalist encourages his fellow compositionalists to integrate these metaphors into their pedagogy, for not only can these metaphors suffuse pedagogical approaches, lesson plans, and notions of classical rhetoric such as invention, arrangement, and style, but they also will evince their utility and value in situations far beyond the composition classroom.

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COMPOSITIONAL METAPHORS: A PEDAGOGICAL NECESSITY?

INSIDER/OUTSIDER DICHOTOMIES

Dichotomies Caused by Differences *vis-a-vis* Written Language

reader*/non-reader

- *vocabulary (active & passive)
- *degree & ease of articulation
- *deeper, better-developed, & more sustained thinking
- *longer, more complex sentences
- *better at abstract thinking

literate*/oral

- *more focused (stays on & delves into a topic)
- *more emphasis on *logos* than on *ethos* or *pathos*
- *analytical & synthetic
- *aware of symbols *qua* symbols

expert writer*/novice writer

- *is all of above, plus
- *is one's own taskmaster
- *uses time as an ally
- *is reconciled to writing\reading ratio
- *knows how to collaborate
- *is "ever" aware of *quaestio*
- *respects--if not reveres--written language

Dichotomies Caused by Differences in Life Experience

broadminded*/narrow-minded mature/naive; cosmopolitan/provencial

- *willing to be patient, to take a "wait-and-see" attitude
- *possessing a sense of history
- *not easily surprised
- *tolerant, willing to consider all sides of an issue
- *not wed to the status quo, nor to the past, nor to the future, nor to change for change's sake

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Dichotomies Caused by Differences in Physiology & Ethnicity

gender

- female
- male

race

- African-American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Mixed
- Native American

ethnicity

- a multitude

sexual orientation

- asexual
- bisexual
- heterosexual
- homosexual

sexuality

- experimentive
- venturesome
- monogamous
- prudish

cognitive style

- visual
- tactile
- aural
- intuitive
- analytical
- feeling
- sensation

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COMPOSITIONAL METAPHORS

[bridged "insider/outsider dichotomies" are in brackets]

Coach [all]

- determines the atmosphere of the class, the rapport between writing teacher and student writer
- introduces student writers to myths about writing
- diagnoses problem areas
- praises and polishes strengths
- motivates and primes for next course, next level of writing

Judge [all but cognitive style]

- defines and justifies evaluative criteria
- ensures that each and every student receives fair treatment
- assures student writers of the worth of "passing muster"

Accoucheur/Accoucheuse [reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer]

- conception
- pregnancy test
- frequent visits
- lifestyle choices
- nutrition
- weight
- exercise(s)
- complications
- ultrasound
- delivery
- postpartum bath
- formal naming
- presentation to family

Master Craftsperson [reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer]

- committed to the assignment, to long-term and short-term goals of the writing course
- faithful to truths, not myths, about writing
- patient with the composing process
- willing to "return to the saddle and boot up"
- reconciled to the writing/reading ratio
- proud of the permanence of the paper; excited about its uniqueness

Trouper [all]

- is the venerable roadshow actor
- is concerned that every student in every class get his or her "money's worth"
- can repeat lines over and over, but knows when to change lines because the trouper can read the audience and oneself
- knows when to change "shows" to avoid "burn-out"

Student as Apprentice Craftsman [reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer]

- committed to the assignment, to the long-term and short-term goals of the writing course
- faithful to truths, not myths, about writing
- patient with the composing process
- willing to "return to the saddle and boot up"
- reconciled to the writing/reading ratio
- content with progress, whether incremental or from plateau to plateau
- proud of the permanence of the paper; excited about its uniqueness

Language as a Bridge [all]

- from inner expression to outer expression
- between writer and reader
- from classroom to career
- from reactive posture to proactive behavior

Composing as a Puzzle [reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer]

- parameters of assignment::parts of puzzle
- part-to-whole/whole-to-part aspects of the draft
- fluid relationship between invention and arrangement

Composing as a Toggle [reader/non-reader, literate/oral, expert writer/novice writer]

- "big picture" <=> "small picture"
- level of word <=> level of sentence <=> level of subtopic <=> level of topic
- writer <=> reader

Composing as Booting Up [expert writer/novice writer]

- re-engage with the draft
- re-view the document vis-a-vis the assignment
- check for problems and for improvements